



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Richard Mendoza, Director, Public Works Department
Ken Snipes, Director, Austin Resource Recovery Department
Dianna Grey, Homeless Strategy Officer

DATE: July 23, 2021

SUBJECT: Underpass Clean-up Process Update, July 29, 2021 Council Agenda Item #96

PURPOSE: This memorandum is to provide an update on the City's underpass clean-up process associated with July 29th, Council Agenda Item #96.

OVERVIEW: The City of Austin assumed the role of cleaning at various underpass locations in spring 2019 after the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) announced they would no longer be performing this service. The process involves removing trash and debris under highway underpasses at least once per month to help ensure public health and safety and allow for inspections of critical transportation bridge infrastructure. This program is part of the City's overall Clean City Strategy and is a companion to the Violet Bag Program.

Implementation of Council Guidance

Last year Council raised concerns about the process. Based on those concerns, the process was reviewed, and the following steps were taken:

- Staff looked at the feasibility and cost to transition services from contract to in-house.
- Staff increased the Violet Bag Program and incorporated improvements to the monthly trash and debris pickup process while engaging with social services providers, HOST and EMS Medics.
- All City and Contract Employees involved in the underpass clean-up process have undergone training to better equip them in working and engaging with our community members that live in the areas to ensure that we are respecting the integrity of these vulnerable populations.
- Staff revised the notice that is posted, to better inform all community members about the process and what it does and does not do.
- Staff added a supplemental posting, outlining other City services that are available.
- Posting materials are provided in both English and Spanish.
- Provide employment opportunities for vulnerable population community members.

KEY COMPONENTS: Staff would like to take this opportunity to update Council of key components on our efforts and our new path forward for the next two years.

Contract Scope

The City's Clean City Strategy has multiple City Staff members, service providers and scopes ranging from bridge underpasses to empty lots to parks to creeks and ponds. This contract specifically focuses on removing trash and debris on highway underpasses and areas in the transportation right of way to help ensure public health and safety and allow for the inspections of critical transportation bridge infrastructure.

Contract Partner

Council has asked staff to help create employment opportunities for community members who might have difficulties obtaining work opportunities. Our contractor, Relief Enterprises, is a non-profit that specializes in providing jobs and job-related support for our community's disabled and vulnerable population while creating a positive impact on the lives of the underprivileged. The additional support provided by Relief Enterprises increases the employment continuation and success of the populations it serves.

Feasibility and Cost to Transition Services In-House

Austin Resource Recovery performed analysis based on information provided by Public Works on resources that the contractor is using to accomplish the scope of work under the contract. This analysis showed that it would be more costly to bring all these services in-house and that it would be more efficient to use a blended approach utilizing both contract and City resources. In addition, a blended approach allows for job opportunities and support via Relief Enterprises that would not be available from Austin Resource Recovery.

The blended approach utilizes the contract resources to conduct monthly scheduled cleanup services while freeing up City crews for spot cleanups to new areas identified that might need a one-time cleanup or areas not specific in the scope of the contract. This allows a more responsive and comprehensive approach while minimizing the impact to our community members that live in these underpasses.

Increase of the Scope of the Violet Bag Program

This year we increased the number of Violet Bag Program Kiosks at the Bridge Underpass Locations from 8 to 44 of the over 60 sites we maintain. Staff also distributes additional Violet Bags and restocks the kiosks when the notices are posted as well as water, gloves, and masks to residents at the locations.

Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) continues to support the Violet Bag program, with 44 locations around Austin. All sites receive daily service to empty carts and remove litter from the area. In the two years that the Violet Bag program has been in place, ARR crews have removed over 600 tons of debris from sites around the city through the program.

Encampment Cleanups

Austin Resource Recovery recently began removing bulk items from encampments including furniture, appliances and mattresses. Crews rotate between Interstate 35, Highway 183 and

Highway 71 over a three-week period before repeating the cycle. The bulk removal service is a supplement to the existing Relief Enterprises contract. ARR crews also provide on-demand cleanups at established or abandoned encampment sites as needed.

Self-Service Pilot Program

Council requested Staff to adjust the process to give the residences an opportunity to maintain the cleanliness of their areas themselves, similar to the services we provide to other community members.

A pilot program was implemented from October 2020 to December 2020. There were two locations selected: 183 / Cameron Road underpass and the 290/71 Packsaddle underpass. The pilot program involved dropping off a dumpster the day before the monthly schedule cleaning and working with the community members residing at the location to help us with trash and debris removal. The dumpster was picked up at the end of day. The next day Public Works and contractors visited the site and picked up any other remaining debris.

The pilot program had initial success the first month, unfortunately participation decreased in each of the following months. Based on the results, staff did not expand the program and ended the pilot in January 2021.

Flexibility of The Contract

The dynamics of the homeless population in Austin is continuously changing in terms of population and shifts in locations of encampments. Staff worked with the City Purchasing Office and the contractor to create flexibility in the contract to add or remove sites to meet the City’s changing needs. When sites need to be added or eliminated from the list of sites, they are evaluated by City staff to ensure they meet the scope outlined in the contract and then work with the City’s Purchasing Office and the contractor to make the necessary changes and updates. In addition, the contract is authorized for the specified amount, but it does not obligate the City to spend the entirety of the funds should demand decrease over time.

Services to Date

The current Underpass Cleanup Contract period began July 30, 2020. The cleanup schedule is arranged into 5 groups and has been adjusted so that most locations will be visited on Tuesday and Thursday of each week. Some groups have been split into two and three separate days due to the size and scope of the tract.

SITES & TONNAGE, BAGS / GLOVES / MASKS

<i>FY21 Year to Date</i>			
<i>Site Visits Conducted to Date</i>	575	<i>Violet Bags Handed Out</i>	2,809
<i>Tonnage of Debris Collected:</i>	655	<i>Gloves Handed Out</i>	2,631
		<i>Masks Handed Out</i>	2,683
<i>Inception to Date</i>			
<i>Site Visits Conducted to Date</i>	1,369	<i>Violet Bags Handed Out</i>	3,732
<i>Tonnage of Debris Collected:</i>	1,085	<i>Gloves Handed Out:</i>	3,253
		<i>Masks Handed Out</i>	3,038

Conclusion: As mentioned at the last year's Council meeting, the goal of this contract and program is to provide a clean and safe environment for our community, while respecting the integrity of this vulnerable population. The Homeless Strategy Office, Austin Resource Recovery, and Public Works are committed to achieving this important goal.

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
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Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager